

Let's decide together!

Guide to meaningful
and effective engagement of children
in decision-making processes



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Guide to meaningful
and effective engagement of children
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Raluca Verweijen-Slamnescu
Independent Consultant

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All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, E-mail: children@coe.int

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This Guide is the result of corroborated experience of many children and adults who genuinely believe in the value and positive impact of children's participation in decision-making processes. The consultant has talked with child participation experts from the Council of Europe, Eurochild, the International Institute for Child Rights and Development, and UNICEF in Romania. Talia Kaufman, M.Ed., provided in-depth support with editing the Guide and developing the Self-Assessment Tool. Thirty-one children from 15 countries in Europe, girls and boys who are active members of international, national and local child advisory structures told their stories of interactions with policy makers, civil servants and community leaders, and have pointed out what motivates and supports them to participate. They also underlined what still needs to be done for them to be heard with respect and consideration for their opinions. We are grateful for their support!

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Who this Guide is for and how it may be used

This Guide is for adults responsible for planning for, and engaging with, children in decision-making processes in local and national authorities. In most cases they are public servants who design and organise child participation activities in decision-making processes taking place in national and local authorities.

■ The aim of the Guide is to support all of them, with practical guidance and inspiring good practices, to make participation in decision-making processes a regular, safe and accessible practice for every child.

■ **While the Guide is meant to be used as a whole, each chapter can be read and used independently.** However, even if interested in only one chapter of this Guide, we encourage the reader to first read chapter 1, which describes necessary prerequisites, processes and resources which make possible inclusive and safe participation of children along with adults in decision making processes of local and national authorities. The six chapters of the Guide refer to:

- ▶ **Pre-requisites** for meaningful, inclusive and safe child participation in decision-making processes (Chapter 1);
- ▶ **Domains, topics and activities** where children can be engaged in decision making (Chapter 2);
- ▶ **Planning** activities for engaging with children in decision-making processes (Chapter 3);
- ▶ **Conducting activities** that engage with children in decision-making processes (Chapter 4);
- ▶ **Providing feedback and evaluation** of child participation in decision-making processes (Chapter 5); and
- ▶ **Safeguarding** in child participation and decision-making processes (Chapter 6).

■ Every chapter contains guidance emerging from the practice, enhanced with inspiring examples, as well as direct links to practical tools and suggestions for specific safeguarding measures.

■ This Guide shall serve as a **practical and quick overview for professionals** who need to know what is the minimum to be considered when engaging with children in decision-making processes, in the various phases of the processes and in different local and national contexts. Attached to the Guide, professionals can find a self-assessment tool to help them benchmark their current level of performance in engaging with children in decision-making processes against the recommendations of the Guide, and to plan for improvements.

■ The users will benefit in knowledge, practice and confidence, if they also read further publications developed by the Council of Europe, especially the [Handbook on children's participation "Listen-Act-Change"](#) (2020), and the "Guidelines for developing a National Children's Participation Strategy or a Participation Strategy within a National Children's Rights Strategy" (2022).

Setting the stage for child participation in decision-making processes at national and local level

Since the coming into force of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, there has been an increase in awareness and commitment for involving children in making decisions about matters that affect their lives. We have seen children's opinions increasingly considered in shaping legislation, policy development and decision-making processes.

An inspiring approach to child participation in decision making process: the Lundy model of child participation

Professor Laura Lundy has created a [model of child participation](#) which provides international, national and local decision makers with a path to help conceptualise children's right to participation. In her approach, professor Lundy emphasises that it is not enough to give children a VOICE. Children also need a SPACE with opportunities to express their views, they shall be exposed to a relevant AUDIENCE, which listens to their views, and their views must be acted upon as appropriate to have an INFLUENCE.

Professor Lundy encourages decision makers to make child participation available at any time, within the limits of given resources and knowledge, without delay or aims at "perfection".

"Participation is always imperfect: there could always be more time, more resources and more children involved. (...) Participation should not be rarefied to the point that it is considered unattainable. It inevitably turns on the creation of a respectful dialogue and, once children's right to be involved is accepted, ways can be found to create appropriate spaces for engagement, not all of which require a battery of expertise in creative methods, helpful and enjoyable as these can be when time and resources permit."¹

Trends to consider when engaging children in decision-making processes

A quick check of research, newsletters, practitioners publications and "grey" literature produced by various organisations available online, reveals how the perception and practice of child participation is changing among decision makers. Four trends might be relevant for those willing to engage with children in decision-making processes :

- ▶ **Children are increasingly concerned about the social, economic, cultural and political contexts they are living in.** They are willing to assume responsibility for co-creating solutions and see this as "the way" they want to live their lives. Decision makers do not need to convince them to participate, but they need to provide them with a SPACE for participation.
- ▶ **Children are increasingly willing to associate with their peers, and there is a growing number of child-led organisations and initiatives.** Many of these exist in children's immediate surrounding physical communities (such as children's councils in schools and local communities), while others are organised in digital spaces. Decision makers can strengthen their VOICE, by removing the bureaucratic barriers for their legal registration and providing them with minimum funding for their functioning.
- ▶ **Children's distrust in political institutions has increased during the COVID 19² pandemic,** when children's participation in decision-making processes was reduced or even absent, even where decisions were about their own education, leisure activities, access to health and social services. While children wanted to have their voices heard and considered, they faced restrictions in accessing spaces where, under normal circumstances, they would regularly exchange opinions, express views, and connect. Decision makers bear the responsibility to be a responsible AUDIENCE for children, both in times of normality and especially in times of crisis.

1. <https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/148759327/Tokenismfin.pdf>
2. Lundy et al. (2021).

- ▶ **Children’s participation in political processes remains relatively low compared to older citizens across the globe.** This is also the case with their low representation in local and national governmental institutions, and in the decreasing number of first-time voters. Beside the distrust in government institutions, and while being concerned about the context they live in, children are sceptical about how their involvement might make a difference. Decision makers shall communicate clearly how children’s views have INFLUENCED policy making processes.
- ▶ **Children use digital communication technology to connect with other children and adults** in their communities, countries and even internationally to address challenges and create solutions. Decision makers now have a new SPACE for engaging children in decision-making processes , and they have the obligation to make this space inclusive and safe for every child involved.

Council of Europe’s efforts to promote and support children’s participation in decision-making processes

■ The Council of Europe places participation of children at the core of its children’s rights agenda. The 2019 report *Joining Forces* explains that “*Child participation is a key strategic objective in the promotion of children’s rights [for Council of Europe] and also a cross cutting approach that is mainstreamed into the organisation’s standard-setting, monitoring and sector specific work*”³. Already, in developing the Council of Europe Recommendation on participation of children and young people under the age of 18⁴, children have been directly involved in the drafting Committee. The guidelines included in the Recommendations support the Council’s member States to promote and inform children and young people about participation and create spaces for participation. The consecutive Council of Europe Strategy 2016 – 2021 has foreseen further measures to promote the participation of children in all settings.

■ The Children’s Rights Division of the Council of Europe has initiated a Joint Project between 2021 and 2023 called **CP4 Europe - Strengthening National Child Participation Frameworks and Action in Europe** co-funded by the European Commission/DG JUST and the Council of Europe (further called CP4EUROPE), and implements it together with partners from the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia. The project has provided concrete opportunities for children to participate in decision-making processes in European countries and has developed a range of resources for child participation, all of which are available on the Council of Europe’s webpage dedicated to supporting its member States progress towards having children participate in decision-making processes⁵.

Key child participation resources developed by the Council of Europe:

- ▶ the **Council of Europe Handbook on children’s participation “Listen-Act-Change”** that aims to assist professionals understand and support children’s right to be heard in settings like schools and other education settings, hospitals and other health care settings, alternative care settings, child protection services, immigration and asylum, family support and pre-school services;
- ▶ the **Child Participation Assessment Tool** containing ten specific measurable indicators which can be used by States to measure progress in implementing the Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18;
- ▶ the **“Guidelines for developing a National Children’s Participation Strategy or a participation Strategy within a National Children’s Rights Strategy”** which aim to support member States’ development of a strategic framework with possible expected results, examples of timeframes with specific milestones, examples of structures (working groups, child advisory groups) and consultation processes, and guidance for establishing a monitoring process to review the level of implementation of national strategies with evaluation indicators as well as follow up;
- ▶ a web **platform on child participation** containing a repository of resources on child participation, including online training which anyone who is interested in enhancing their knowledge and practice in child participation can take;
- ▶ a guiding package on organising Child-friendly Child Participation Campaigns;

3. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/participation>

4. https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cb0ca

5. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/participation>

- ▶ this **Guide for child participation in decision-making processes within local and national authorities** which aims to support decision makers in local and national authorities with practical guidance and inspiring good practices to make participation in decision-making processes a regular, safe and accessible practice for every child.

■ As one of the most recent resources on child participation developed by the Council of Europe, this guide builds upon the previous work on child participation undertaken by the Council of Europe, and enhances it with suggestions from children themselves about how their participation in decision making processes can be meaningful, inclusive and safe. The project involved 31 children from 15 countries⁶, some of whom come from vulnerable families and communities, members of the CP4Europe Children’s Advisory Team to the Council of Europe, the Eurochild Children’s Council and children’s local councils supported by UNICEF Romania through the Child Friendly Cities initiative.

Child participation in decision-making processes in practice: some examples of children’s engagement with national and local authorities

■ Acknowledging that from country-to-country **national authorities** might include different actors and titles, this guide perceives participation of children in decision making at national level to primarily target processes of making laws and overseeing national policies that affect entire nations.

■ A few inspiring examples of engaging with children in decision-making processes at national level have been provided by literature, interviews and a recent conference organised in the framework of the CP4EUROPE project:

The Children’s Parliament in France

■ **The Children’s Parliament** has been organised by the National Assembly, the Ministry of National Education and Youth, and the Agency for French Education Abroad since 1994. Its purpose is to promote democratic dialogue and debate among fourth grade students (CM2) during class hours. Members are elected from public or private schools from mainland France, overseas, and classes in French schools abroad.

■ Students are guided by teachers to develop a bill that is evaluated by academic juries and four projects are subject to debate online. The project that gets the maximum number of votes becomes the Children’s Parliament law of the year, and the winning class receives prizes from the President of the National Assembly and from the Minister of National Education. In the 2022-2023 edition, the theme was “Strengthening democratic participation and trust in institutions”, generated by absenteeism from the recent elections and the feeling of distrust in democratic institutions. Among the developed projects within the Children’s Parliament four have become laws of France:

- ▶ Law no. 96-1238 of December 30, 1996, concerned with maintaining bonds between brothers and sisters;
- ▶ Law no. 98-381 of May 14, 1998 which allows for children without parental care to participate in family councils;
- ▶ Law no. 99-478 of June 9, 1999 on encouraging respect for the rights of the child around the world, especially when purchasing school supplies; and
- ▶ Law no. 2000-197 of March 6, 2000 which aims to strengthen the role of schools in prevention and response of child abuse.

■ Based on the French model, and initiated by UNESCO and the lower house of the French Parliament, the World Parliament of Children was formed in 1999. It brought together four hundred young people from one hundred and seventy-five countries and promoted democratic values in a difficult international context, addressing themes such as peacekeeping, solidarity, education and culture, economic development and human and environmental protection.

6. Czech Republic, Slovenia, Island, Finland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta, Greece, Scotland, Hungary, Estonia, Serbia, Germany and Romania

Similar experiences in Europe: The *Cyprus Children's Parliament*, has been a year-round standing body since 2001 and provides children with opportunities to deliberate on decisions which concern them. It comprises 80 voting members and four observer members, the composition of which is regulated by quotas to ensure adequate representation of the nation's different ethnic groups. In Scotland, *cabinet meetings have been held with children and young people* on an annual basis since 2017 to provide children with the opportunity to share their views and experiences with Scottish ministers. Although there are no permanently active youth parliaments in Estonia, the government holds an annual Youth Forum called '*101 Children at Toompea*', during which children are invited to the Estonian parliament to express their views and participate in decision-making.

Children's conferences in Iceland

■ The Ombudsperson for Children in Iceland has the legal obligation to organise a [national Children's Conference](#) every other year. The conference is a legally binding event, with secured adequate resources, which allows for participation of children travelling from remote regions and quality professional support in organising the event and supporting children aged 11 to 15 who attend. To further ensure diversity and inclusion, a certain number of places are reserved for children belonging to vulnerable groups (e.g. children with long-term illnesses, children with disabilities, children of migrant background and LGBTQI+ children); NGOs working with them can delegate these children to the conference. Children are involved in the design and facilitation of the conference. No topics are decided previously to the conference; children themselves can decide which are the three priority topics for them and organise themselves into groups working on the same theme.

Youth participatory national budgets in Portugal

■ Portugal has a long history of concerns and actions regarding youth participation, which is also embedded in the country's Constitution from 1976. Portugal has carried out one of the first experiments in the world where citizens have a say in terms of national spending, creating a general national participatory budget. The [youth participatory budget](#) has been implemented since 2017, as a democratic process of participation in which children and young people aged between 14-30 can propose and decide upon public investment projects that the authorities have responsibility to put into practice. Thematic areas in which the proposals can fit are education, formal and non-formal, employment, housing, health, environment and sustainable development, governance and participation, and equality and social inclusion. Criteria that proposals must respect are: maximum amount of €100,000, does not involve construction of infrastructure, without support services, implies more than one municipality, location on the territory national, technically feasible, does not counteract the government program or the ongoing projects and programs in different areas of public policies. So far, the participatory youth budget has financed projects such as an inclusive Sports Resource Center (in the region Alentejo) which provides adapted sports equipment for people with motor disabilities, a recovery project of a forest in the Ribeira area through reintroduction of native fauna and flora, and a project in Pateira of rehabilitation of pedestrian areas and creating spaces for observing fauna and flora. The participatory youth budget is supervised by the Ministry of Education and the Portuguese Institute for Youth and Sports and financed by the Ministry of Finance.

National consultations on the school meals programme in Finland

■ Finland has offered school meals free of charge for pupils since 1948. Legislation lays the foundation for school meals, and all pupils in pre-primary and basic education and all students in upper secondary education are equally entitled to them. Every day, some 900,000 children and young people have a school meal. Despite the long experience of Finland's internationally unique school meals system, it was felt that there was need for reform and further development. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry conducted extensive child participation consultations to increase the appreciation of school food and participation in school meals, increase the domestic content, healthiness and eco-friendliness of school meals and develop equal and communal meals. Children and young people were consulted during workshops held for young people in co-operation with the Youth Work Centre of Expertise for Participation and Influencing, through targeted surveys, at stakeholder meetings and during Timeout discussions. The [developed proposals and related measures](#) will be implemented in accordance with general government fiscal plans and the government budget.

Children's involvement in creating a child-friendly environment in the family courts in England

■ In England, children involved in an advisory group for the Ministry of Justice (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) have a role advising family courts on how to create child-friendly environments. Children from the advisory group visit the court buildings and assessment settings and conduct audits. Their views are then fed back to the authorities. Based on the feedback, changes have been made to court buildings in some locations to provide for more appropriate, child-friendly spaces.

National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making in Ireland

■ In 2015, Ireland was the first country in Europe to develop a strategy regarding children's participation in decision-making. The National Strategy establishes five national outcome areas in which children and young people must have a voice: to be active and healthy; to be high achievers in all areas of learning and development; to be safe and protected from harm; to enjoy security and economic opportunities; and to be connected, respected and contributing.

■ The main objectives and priorities for action of the strategy are:

- ▶ Children and young people will have a voice in the decisions made in their local communities;
- ▶ Children and young people will have a voice in the process of decision making in early childhood education, schools and in the wider systems of formal education and non-formal education;
- ▶ Children and young people will have a voice in the decisions that affect their well-being, including decisions regarding health and social services; and
- ▶ Children and young people will have a voice in the courts and in the legal system.

■ The Strategy has led to the establishment of a participation hub, [Hub na Nóg](#), to provide centralised support for different participation-related activities by local authorities.

■ **Local authorities** are geographically localised and have limited power which reduces to overseeing local issues and running services that benefit the local area. Children's involvement at local level might primarily target making decisions about how education, health and social services, public libraries, transport, even waste disposal, countywide planning and protecting the environment should happen in the context of a particular local community.

■ Children's participation at the level of local authorities are diverse, and we have chosen a couple of examples of formalised structures, which provide children with regular opportunities of engagement in decision-making processes below.

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) supported by UNICEF

■ This [UNICEF-led initiative](#) supports municipal governments in realising the rights of children at the local level. The initiative is currently implemented in over 38 countries (and 4 other countries are in the pipeline), in 3,400 cities and communities, and involves over 30 million children and youth worldwide. The [Handbook of Child Friendly Cities and Communities Initiative](#) includes a wealth of practical tools that can be used by local authorities in recruiting and engaging with children in the decision making process.

CFCI has led so far to the following outcomes:

- ▶ Improved local government data availability for better needs assessment;
- ▶ Development of evidence-based plans and budgets that address children's needs;
- ▶ Improved child and equity focus in budget laws, policies and procedures for intergovernmental transfers;
- ▶ Institutionalised public participation and involving children, adolescents and their families in local decision-making;
- ▶ Increased social accountability – the capacity of communities to monitor local policies, programmes and projects;
- ▶ Local social services adapted to the needs of children and their families, including the most vulnerable; and
- ▶ Clarity on local roles and responsibilities and strengthened coordination between stakeholders (national and local governments, private sector, civil society).

Community scorecards (CSC) used by municipalities in Kosovo

■ CSC is a participatory tool for assessment, planning, monitoring, and evaluation of child services with a child-centred approach where participation of children is vital. Children and representatives of educational, health and child protection local services have worked together to positively influence the quality, efficiency, and accountability of services provided to children at different levels.

Local youth councils in Ireland

■ Comhairlí na nÓg gives children and young people a voice in decision making on service and policy development locally. These are recognized as permanent participation structures of children and young people in all 31 local authorities of Ireland. Funding of local youth councils is provided and administered by the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth.

■ Through the youth councils, children and young people act as an advisory forum for local decision makers. The main areas where councils contributed to national policy include the development of the National Youth Strategy LGBTI+, relationships and sexual education review in primary and post-primary school for the Board National for Curriculum and Assessment, a new strategy for the Environmental Protection Agency, assessing the impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing of young people, on the supply of teaching staff and on physical activity and on the Action Plan for climate. The strategic goals and objectives for the following five years of local youth councils in Ireland are:

- ▶ Reaching and influencing – expanding reach and wider engagement with young people and decision makers to strengthen the voice and influence of young people in local and national decision making;
- ▶ Operational delivery – ensuring councils have the resources, systems, processes and support to operate efficiently and enable young people to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives;
- ▶ Culture, recognition and communication – improving awareness, recognition and understanding among all young people and cultivating a culture of inclusion and participation in a diverse and vibrant community;
- ▶ Structures and relationships – strengthening and improving the structures and relationships underlying council activities, the youth parliament and the national executive, and relying on them, so that they are organised, coherent and efficient – allowing them to reach their potential and ensuring that the voices of young people are heard; and
- ▶ Evidence-based innovation – building evidence bases to inform the best practices and to actively seek new and innovative ways to develop and improve councils premises for youth.

In Croatia, for example, the government announced in 2018 that local and regional representatives would begin to receive training to enable representatives to better support the youth councils under their supervision and more effectively encourage young people's involvement in politics and society.

■ While not aiming to be perfect, participation of children must be done continuously and with respect. Children and adults have different preferences in learning, experimenting and exchanging with peers, and the report will encourage everyone to develop their own routine of child participation in their context. With this guide, we aim to provide adults who want to engage with children in decision-making processes, at local and national level, with basic information, tools and support they need to secure meaningful participation of children and young people.

■ The next chapters should give more details for local and national authorities on how to proceed.

Chapter 1

Prerequisites for meaningful, inclusive and safe child participation in decision-making processes in national and local authorities

Chapter 1 outlines key prerequisites for including child participation in decision making processes to be sustainably embedded in the strategic planning of a local or national authority. Children have a legitimate right to be involved, through **collective participation**, in processes aiming to influence the policy and practice in the communities where they live. Children and adults can engage with each other in **co-creating decisions**, which could imply researching together, building arguments and negotiating over various solutions, and transparently tracing how children's views have been considered in the decisions taken.

■ Children acquire knowledge, develop new skills, and enhance their confidence when participating in making decisions. When engaging with children, public officials gain new perspectives on the topics under discussion, learn about possible solutions, and gain allies in having these solutions applied and supported. A society where child participation is routine in every decision making process is more likely to be inclusive, peaceful and empowering towards its most vulnerable members.

■ Meaningful, sustainable and safe engagement of children in decision-making processes supposes the existence of a supporting legal framework, sound supporting policies, and sufficient budget to secure necessary professional human resources and finance dedicated activities. We call them prerequisites for engaging with children in decision-making processes and they are listed below. Many of them equally apply to both local and national authorities.

Supportive policies and legal framework

■ Countries with advanced experience in child participation in decision-making processes have national child participation strategies or requirements for child participation in their legal and policy framework. If this is not the case, it is important for public servants with child participation responsibilities to advocate within their own organisations and towards the national Government to explicitly mention the obligation of national and local authorities to formally include collective child participation in national legislation and local regulations.

Recommended measures for advocacy:

- ▶ The Council of Europe recently developed comprehensive guidance on developing national child participation strategies. Including child participation in the country strategy on child protection can be a great support;
- ▶ Advocate for local legislation to foresee sustainable child participation in decision making structures (such as Child Advisory Groups or Children's Councils). When the legislation includes the obligation of the Youth Council, either should this be extended to children, or a Children's Council should be attached to it;
- ▶ Use the event of involving children in drafting the country's report to the United Nations Committee on Children's Rights to raise awareness in your organisation and to show added value for engaging children in decision-making processes. This [guide](#) by Child Rights Connect provides useful guidance in this regard.

Relevant training and professional development opportunities

Meaningful and safe child participation in decision making is organised and facilitated by specially appointed trained staff members, with a deep understanding of children's rights and trust in children's capacities to have pertinent opinions about issues affecting their lives. Ideally, one full-time staff member in the authority has the responsibility to coordinate child participation in decision-making processes. This person should be trained on child participation and support children in their participation.

Employees coordinating child participation, and especially those who have not attended training before, should be able to attend training on child participation. In addition to this, it has proven useful to provide all adults meeting children with an orientation session on how to engage with children in making decisions and the impact of such activities. Similarly, children should be offered training opportunities, not only on child participation, but also on financial education, citizenship, communication and negotiation in decision making, etc.

Learning and experience can be enhanced through networking and peer-to-peer support. Connecting with like-minded organisations, identifying networks or platforms of national and local authorities where child participation in decision making is discussed can help. The [Child Participation Leadership Platform developed by the Council of Europe](#) can help identify "champions" for engaging with children in decision-making processes.

Working with external child participation facilitators who train and support children is a good practice in many countries.

Awareness about the diversity of the children's population

To ensure diversity, inclusion and ethical participation of children in decision-making processes, local and national authorities need to have a correct view of the various ways diversity is manifested in the children's population of their communities and in the country in general. Data analysis should identify children's diversity with regard to age, gender and sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, religion, socio-economical, family and care status, etc. The consultative groups of children should reflect the diversity of the children population in the community.

Dedicated financial resources

A dedicated and sufficient budget is an important prerequisite for child participation of quality. Depending on the type of child participation activities foreseen, different categories of costs should be considered, such as costs for in-house and external training activities, including summer camps, costs for transportation, costs for developing and printing child friendly informative documents, costs for external facilitation, etc.

Involving children with special needs and requirements is an essential prerequisite for diversity and inclusion in child participation. To make their participation safe, additional costs should be budgeted, such as costs for renting adapted means of transportation for children with disabilities, translation for children from national minorities, costs for accompanying adults, assistive technologies and sign-interpretation, etc.

While local authorities are physically closer to children, children's participation in consultations with national authorities should be considered in sufficient budgets. These should consider costs of transportation of children coming from further regions of the countries, proper accommodation which considers the possibility of children not to share a room, meals which respect options of children coming from various ethnic, national and religious minorities and dietary needs or preferences.

Supporting safeguarding framework

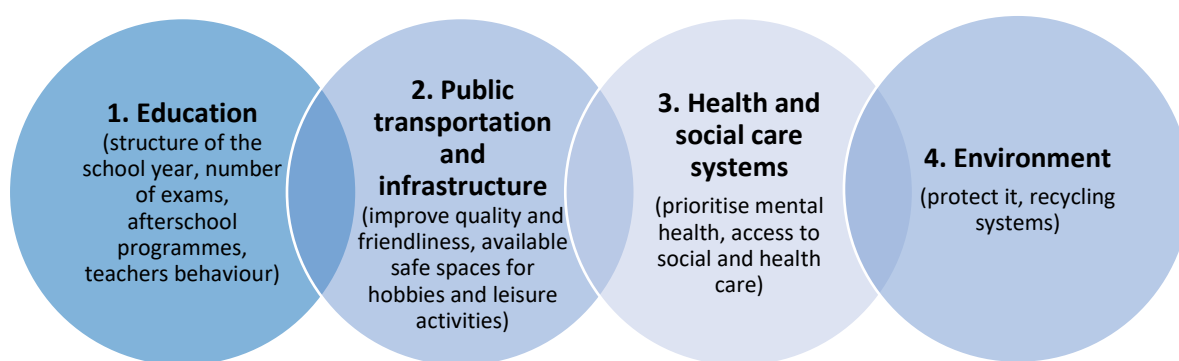
Children and adults engaging together in decision making must be safe at all times and in any context. The existence of safeguarding policies and a Code of Conduct, including a child-friendly format of these, which are known and used by employees of the local and national authorities and promoted by the management, support the creation of a safe environment for children to participate in decision-making processes. Chapter 6 on *Safeguarding within child participation in decision-making processes*, includes additional information and guidance.

Chapter 2

Domains, topics and activities where children can be engaged in decision making

Chapter 2 provides an overview of key domains where children can be safely involved in decision making. In most countries, children's participation in making decisions is regulated by law in the domains of education, justice, health and social welfare services, as well as in the activities of the local authorities.

Children consulted in the process of drafting this guide have indicated the following as priority topics where their opinions should be considered in decision-making processes:



Prioritisation of issues which require engagement with children in decision-making processes is meaningful when a diverse and inclusive group of children are involved. Although it might be faster to organise a simple online survey or a discussion among children alone to identify priority topics, a collaborative approach allowing adults and children to propose and negotiate priorities together has more learning potential. An intergenerational consultation sets the basis for working together to carry out plans, and brings in important information from more perspectives about the topics to be prioritised. Furthermore, it is of great importance to ensure that children with diverse backgrounds are involved in this prioritisation. Chapter 3: *Planning activities for engaging with children in decision-making processes* provides guidance on how to build inclusive and diverse children's advisory groups at the national and local levels, with recommendations of good practices for advertising opportunities and selecting participants.

Below are recommendations for how to decide on and prioritise the domains, topics and activities children in which to involve children.

For national authorities

- ▶ **Consult national legislation and policies for what is already compulsory in fulfilling child participation in decision-making processes:**
 - Look for provisions on collective child participation in the national legislations on protecting and promoting children's rights, education, health and social welfare, as well as in the legislation regulating how citizens, including children and young people, are involved in decisions making processes of public authorities;
 - Review the standard procedures of Parliament and Ministries to identify what are their obligations of consulting with children when developing and approving new laws and ordinances. There should be a particular focus on Ministries regulating education, health, child protection and care;
 - Check whether including children in public consultations over new legal projects is mentioned by the national legislation, or by regulatory standards of the Parliament and Ministries..
- ▶ **Collect information about how and in which domains children's participation has made a difference in the decisions taken by Parliament or the Government**
- ▶ **Communicate** through various media channels (press and social media) the impact of engaging children in decision-making processes at national level.

TIP: If you plan to include obligation for collective participation of children in decision-making processes in your national legislations, it could be significantly helpful to use the Guidance on Developing a National Children's Participation Strategy, or a participation Strategy within a National Children's Rights Strategy developed by the Council of Europe.

For local authorities

- ▶ **Consult national legislation regulating the functioning of local and regional authorities** in your countries to identify whether there is an obligation to consult with children and young people
 - Check if there is an obligation to establish a Children's Council in your country
 - If there is an obligation for a Youth Council, consult the mayor and local councillors to check what the minimum age of its members is, and if children can become members as well.
- ▶ **Consult with other public authorities and NGOs** with more experience in engaging children in decision-making processes and learn from their experience;
- ▶ **Collect children's and staff members' opinions** on which domains, topics and activities will benefit by engaging with children, and involve children in prioritising them.

TIP: The list of [countries implementing the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiatives](#) could help you find out if there are any municipalities you can exchange with in your country. This "community mapping" tool used by World Vision could help in working with children to identify priority topics where children should be engaged in decision-making processes.

For both local and national authorities:

- ▶ **Review existing efforts of your national / local authorities to engage with children** in decision-making processes, analyse possible gaps, and decide on further steps;
- ▶ **Assess how feasible it is for your organisation to organise and establish permanent, formal structures** such as Children's Councils, Children's Parliaments, or Children's Advisory Boards;
- ▶ **Reach out to vulnerable communities directly or connect with organisations providing services for children at risk** and learn from them how to involve these children in identifying and prioritising domains. Actively seek cooperation with child-led initiatives, especially those where the children involved have been affected by marginalisation.

Safeguarding hints and tips:

- ▶ **Check your organisation's safeguarding policies** and codes of conduct and ensure these comprehensively cover guidelines on staff and volunteer behaviour during children's participation in decision-making processes. If your organisation doesn't have a safeguarding policy here, you could start developing one.

TIP: Every organisation should develop its own safeguarding policy. The process of developing a safeguarding policy is as important as the outcome; the safeguarding policy itself. Keeping Children Safe offers detailed guidance on [how to develop a safeguarding policy](#). Our advice is to work with an external consultant on developing your safeguarding policy. Children and young people need to be involved in drafting the safeguarding policy.

- ▶ **Conduct safeguarding risk assessments** whenever you start a process of consulting with children and develop a risk mitigation plan. A safeguarding risk assessment would help you understand which risks of abuse and exploitation children might be exposed to when participating in decision making activities, as well as in their families, schools and communities. A useful template for conducting a safeguarding risk assessment can be found [here](#).
- ▶ **Identify the responsible person in your organisation** who could support you to develop and implement a safeguarding framework for child participation. You might like to appoint a safeguarding focal point and [this document](#) (see Annex 5 at page 44) would help you to define this person's role.
- ▶ **Inform management and staff about any possible safeguarding risks** when involving children in decision-making processes and how these can be mitigated. This [document](#) developed by Plan International provides a comprehensive list of child safeguarding risks in thematic areas, among them in child participation activities.

Chapter 3

Planning activities for engaging with children in decision-making processes

Chapter 3 provides guidance on how to logistically support children's participation, including concrete measures to be taken for organising concrete activities on engaging children in decision-making processes.

■ A good starting point for planning for collective participation in decision-making processes would be to revisit the key considerations outlined in the Annex 7 in the Council of Europe Handbook "Listen – Act – Change".

When planning for child participation to become an ingredient of all decision-making processes, it might be useful to approach creating and supporting formal and informal groups of children similarly to how you might build a **football team**⁷:

- ▶ A football team has **11 players on the field, as well as "reserves"**: other talented players who can always replace colleagues who are not able to participate.
- ▶ The team **receives continuous and diverse support from professionals** to be able to perform.
- ▶ To be able to perform well, **players know the talents and particular strengths of every member and meet regularly to practise** bringing all these strengths together to achieve a goal.
- ▶ Teams perform well when **more experienced players are present and support newcomers**.
- ▶ Managers are **always searching for new talent** to join the team.

■ This section below contains CP4Europe's recommendation on how to approach planning activities for engaging children in decision-making processes. Some common recommendations for both local and national authorities are followed by more specific recommendations, depending on whether activities will be organised at a local or national level:

For both local and national authorities

- ▶ **Identify and allocate necessary human and financial resources** to fulfil the pre-requisites for meaningful, inclusive and safe participation in decision-making processes, as outlined in chapter 1;
- ▶ **Identify staff members with previous experience in child participation** in your organisations and ask them to support you in organising children's participation in decision-making processes. They could provide guidance on how to organise such activities or act as facilitators. You could partner with organisations or consultants with sound experience on facilitating children's participation in decision-making processes;
- ▶ **Assess the training and orientation needs** of those involved (children and adults) and identify possible organisations and consultants who could provide support;
- ▶ **Involve children, politicians, public servants, specialised NGOs and consultants in a dedicated meeting** on planning for engaging children in decision making process;
- ▶ **Prepare child-friendly informative materials** about the process of engagement, its purpose and impact on the lives of children and adults, the necessary information and skills children need to be involved, how they can express their opinions, how evaluation will happen, and what feedback will be provided.
- ▶ **Develop a set of eligibility criteria** to maximise transparency and clarity on who could be involved, the need for any previous knowledge and experience, which language the activities will take place in, and how translation will be provided (think of Braille and sign language, as well as languages spoken by ethnic and national minorities);

7. Copyrights for the photo: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/135956755/Equipe-de-France-de-football-French-football-team/modules/769187923>

- ▶ **Advertise broadly and creatively for reaching the most difficult to access children** by using traditional communication paths connected with school, social and medical centres, NGOs, as well as social media channels which are regularly used by children (e.g. Instagram and Twitter accounts of students associations, and even of local mayors) and public campaigns.

The questions below could help in the processes of making participation inclusive to every child:

- ▶ Who are the children who are regularly absent in child participation activities?
- ▶ What hinders them being present: their age, disability, belonging to a minority exposed to discrimination, poverty, lack of information, cultural beliefs in their families, their sexual orientation, their fear of being exposed to bullying?
- ▶ Are there physical accessibility barriers for children with disabilities, for children living in remote areas, who might not be able to travel alone or at all?
- ▶ What needs to be done to ensure full safety for participating children, both during the activities, as well as after the activities, including communication post-activity through various media channels?
- ▶ How could you provide additional support to remove barriers in participation, such as: having an adult supporting children with a disability, providing accessible transportation, assistive devices, interpretation, etc.?
- ▶ Does your plan for engaging children in decision-making processes consider local and national school holidays, national celebrations, regular daily school programme and the intense periods of school exams?

Having diversity in the group of children applying and being selected might require more time. Stakeholders consulted for this report mention that it can take up to three times longer than planned if one tries to reach out to the most marginalised groups of children and convince them to apply and participate in decision-making processes. **Allow for this extra time.** Reach out to organisations working with vulnerable, marginalised groups of children and get their support in achieving the desired diversity and inclusion in the group of children you engage with when making decisions.

For local authorities

For local authorities, in addition to the above, we recommend that you:

- ▶ **Identify in the community young people who have already participated in decision-making processes** to involve as mentors and buddies for supporting children in their participation;
- ▶ **Consider the diversity within the children's population in your community** and develop selection criteria to ensure that this diversity is reflected in the group of children participating in decision-making processes. Think of age (younger children tend to be excluded from the consultation process), gender identity and sexual orientation, disabilities, belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, children in care or in conflict with justice, etc. A useful reading on how to build up local Children's Councils is the [UNICEF study on child and youth Councils](#). Chapters 5 and 6 in the study provide practical guidance on how to organise child and youth councils and which power mandates can be entrusted to them.
- ▶ **Identify partners who could support you** to disseminate the information about collective participation opportunities with children. This might include schools and school unions, health care institutions, prisons, child protection and care organisations, child clubs, day-care centres in vulnerable communities, online and offline "influencers" in the communities.
- ▶ You might like to **dedicate a workshop to identify all possible physical, social and psychological barriers hindering children even wanting to participate**, and consequently develop strategies to remove them.

To help find potential members for your local Children's Council, you can prepare an information sheet to distribute and encourage children to apply. Include the following information about the opportunity and be sure to write it in a concise way:

- ▶ Purpose of the process/activity;
- ▶ Expected impact on the lives of children and adults;
- ▶ How many and who are the children involved;

- ▶ You might like to add in capital letters “EVERYBODY IS WELCOME!” or “*children with disabilities, LGBTQ+, deaf children, and young people of all backgrounds are welcome to apply,*” to underline your intention to secure diversity and inclusiveness;
- ▶ Be sure that if you do advertise inclusiveness that your team is prepared to meet the needs of diverse youth so that everyone has a good experience;
- ▶ Any previous knowledge of the topic or experience that you want participants to bring (you might like to mention what kind of support is provided for those without previous experience);
- ▶ Information about how the application and selection processes will be organised, including whether children are involved in the selection process;
- ▶ Describe regular activities: type of activities, frequency, duration, location, calendar;
- ▶ Use child friendly (however, not childish) language and a colourful layout;
- ▶ If any incentives are available, communicate them;
- ▶ Logistics and available support (including facilitation with transport, acquisition of internet data, accommodation for longer meetings, etc.);
- ▶ Confidentiality and safeguarding procedures, and how to consent to taking part.

For transparency, informed decision-making, diversity and inclusion, you have to clearly indicate the eligibility criteria! These could be age (aim for children younger than 16 to allow for longer involvement), gender identity and sexual orientation, children with disabilities, deaf children, migrant children, children in alternative care, ethnic minorities, coming from single-parent families or families living in poverty, etc. **A mapping of diversity in the community helps identify all categories of children who should be involved.**

For national authorities

■ While being similar in many regards, the processes of engaging children at national level and at local level might require considering some different particularities when planning. Therefore, **to support children to be engaged at a national level** (i.e. in Children’s Parliaments, or in consultative or advisory bodies to Governmental bodies), we recommend national authorities consider these specific requests:

- ▶ **Cover costs for travelling to the capital city** for face-to-face meetings, as this might be a long distance. Costs shall also cover accompanying adults (chaperones).
- ▶ **Prepare information letters for the school, as children might miss some days of school;** in some countries children would not be able to continue their education if they miss too many days of school.
- ▶ **Inform children about the need of allocating longer time** for tasks which require reading long, complex documents or attending online or face-to-face conversations and negotiations.
- ▶ **Support children to understand longer, complex, technical documents,** drafted in a less child-friendly language,
- ▶ **Raise children’s interest in addressing topics which are country relevant,** even if these are not a high priority in their home community.
- ▶ **Establish partnerships with NGOs and UNICEF agencies that have supported or hosted permanent formal and informal networks of children,** and involve these networks for participation in consultations with the Parliament, ministries and the Government to draft national laws and policies, including the national child protection strategy and national reports to the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child.

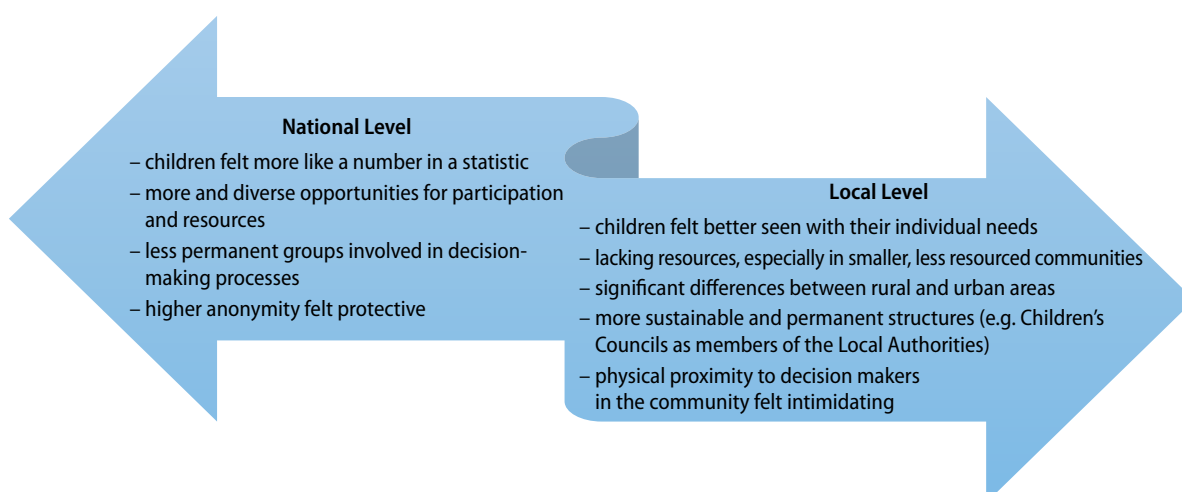
To overcome some of the above-mentioned limitations, national authorities should take advantage of the increased use of online communication in child participation. Children’s online engagement brings in positive developments such as:

- ▶ access to more creative communication channels and tools;
- ▶ faster connection and organisation of broader groups of children;
- ▶ lower costs;
- ▶ removal of physical and social barriers that may hinder participation in offline activities;
- ▶ increased mobilisation of larger remote and vulnerable groups;
- ▶ easier matching in mentoring and peer-to-peer support in child participation;
- ▶ reduced adult mediations in child participation led initiatives.

By using forms of anonymisation in online communication, these disenfranchised children are more likely to openly express their views and less at risk of exclusion, labelling and bullying. Yet keep in mind that moving child participation online can exclude those with reduced digital literacy and affected by inequity of access to the internet or digital devices, and expose children to online forms of abuse and violence.⁸

TIP: visit the comprehensive webpage developed by the Irish Government to support their child participation national strategy. It contains helpful tips on how to involve child participation in decision making for developing policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation. A planning check-list, aligned to the Lundy participation model is available [here](#).

■ We asked children involved in consultations for this guide about whether they have recognised the difference between participation in decision making at national level, in comparison to their involvement in local consultative bodies. Children's answers were diverse: some children felt more comfortable with participating in regular meetings with their local authorities, addressing issues concerning their everyday life, in their immediate surroundings, when changes are more visible and faster. However, participation at community level might easily expose children to bullying when they support unpopular decisions rejected by other children or adults in the community, even by their own families or classmates. The differences between participation at national and local level mentioned by children are illustrated in the graphic below:



Safeguarding hints and tips:

- ▶ Children belonging to vulnerable groups (children belonging to ethnic minorities, families living in extreme poverty, children with disabilities or belonging to the LGBTQIA community, etc) experience a range of specific safeguarding risks, and these should be considered in the risk assessment included for safeguarding tips in Chapter 2. Some practical guidance for the effective safeguarding of children from minority ethnic, cultural and faith communities, groups and families, can be found [here](#) (in particular sub-chapter 4).
- ▶ Plan training activities on violence and, in particular, bullying. The Anti-bullying Alliance provides certified free online training for professionals working with children and more information can be accessed [here](#). You could also contact a local organisation that could provide staff members working with children in decision-making processes with a face-to-face orientation or training on bullying or child safeguarding in general.
- ▶ Enforce voluntary participation and informed consent and review periodically. A model for a child consent form developed by Save the Children can be found and adapted [here](#).
- ▶ Inform the children's parents / legal guardians about the purpose, the timing and time commitment of the consultations and how children will be asked to engage with the process. [Here](#) you can find a consent form for parents of children attending an event organised by Save the Children. This can be adapted, according to the activities organised by a local and national authority.

8. CIVICUS (2022)

- ▶ Develop simple-language 'media consent' forms to share information about how your organisation might use images and recordings or quotes from their engagement in the opportunity. Ask for children's and legal guardians' consent for using children's images and opinions for any internal and external documents, even where anonymity and confidentiality is already specified. You can use [this example](#) of a Media Consent form developed by Save the Children to develop a consent form for the use of images of children participating in an activity.

Chapter 4

Conducting activities to engage with children in decision-making processes

Chapter 4 maps out several different approaches for carrying out participatory activities with children and young people. Children's participation in decision-making processes can take many forms. Whether it takes place within a fixed consultation structure, or in ad-hoc and one-off events, activities are strongly influenced in their format by the community or country's:

- ▶ approach to respecting human rights, and in particular children's rights;
- ▶ culture of participation, diversity and inclusion;
- ▶ preference, feasibility or necessity for more online or offline formats; and
- ▶ available resources for participation.

Activities need to be adapted to the age of children and consider their accessibility needs, cultural and religious beliefs. Moreover, activities may need to be organised in locations accessible for children with disabilities, or by gender-disaggregated groups, and involve facilitators and interpreters who can support children's equal participation.

The increased digitalisation of children's participation in decision-making processes raises questions about the advantages and disadvantages of each of these formats. Some are of the opinion⁹ that child participation in decision making can take place entirely or mostly online through various petitions and campaigns, and by using online social media channels such as Twitter, Tik Tok and Instagram.

Children's online engagement in decision making brings several positive developments, such as: access to various and more creative communication channels and tools; faster connection and organisation of broader groups of children; increased spontaneity and fewer resources to plan, organise, and implement¹⁰ activities; removal of physical and social barriers hindering participation in offline activities; increased mobilisation of larger remote and vulnerable groups through virtual gatherings, petitions and social media postings; easier matching in mentoring and peer-to-peer support in child participation; and reduced adult mediations in child participation led initiatives. By using forms of anonymisation in online communication, children belonging to ethnic, sexual orientation/gender and religious minorities, may be more likely to openly express their views and be less at risk of marginalisation, labelling and bullying.

Digitalisation of child participation also carries new risks for children, such as: the exclusion of those with reduced digital literacy and those affected by inequity of access to internet/digital devices; exposure to online forms of abuse and violence; unbalanced familiarity with digital participation among adults and children; and increased state surveillance and online restrictions which can be imposed by governments, especially in totalitarian states.

There are some concerns¹¹ that child participation done only through online spaces might be more superficial in comparison with offline, in-person consultations. It might reduce participation to a click to support a petition and miss supporting a more constant and deeper engagement like the chance to support decision makers or civic organisations in addressing root causes of a social problem.

Experts in child participation suggest using a variety of activities and types of interaction when engaging with children, both in online and offline formats.

9. CIVICUS (2022) and Lundy et. al (2021)

10. CIVICUS (2022)

11. CIVICUS (2022)

Below are our recommendations for practical steps to be considered when conducting activities for engaging children in decision-making processes. Consider that to a great extent **these are equally relevant for local and national authorities.**

- ▶ **Decide which type of activities will be chosen** for children's involvement
 - face-to-face, online or hybrid activities: for choosing among them, you could consider the advantages and disadvantages listed in the box above.
 - one-off or regular activities: when a law project is the subject of consultations with children, a one-off well organised event should suffice. If a local authority aims to collect and consider children's opinion in all decisions regarding education, health, infrastructure and social protection, a permanent children's council, with regular meetings, might be a better structure.
- ▶ **Ensure a child friendly environment for face-to-face meetings** considering:
 - **Time:** are the meetings organised before or after their school activities, at a time when they are allowed to be out of their house?
 - **Space:** is the space big enough for plenary and smaller groups, with lots of light and possibilities of opening doors and windows, a flexible structure where chairs can be organised in a circle, or children can be seated on the floor (on pillows or carpet)? Are children allowed to take off their shoes?
 - **Participants:** Ideally, the number of child and adult participants should be balanced; if possible, a child should never be alone in a meeting where everybody else is an adult;

TIP: You might like to follow the model of a CPAT conference organised by children in the Czech Republic, where everybody (children and adults) was mentioned in the programme, and on the participants' badges, *without* their family name, title and current professional position.

- **Programme:** are there sufficient breaks? Does it allow for alternate seating and moving around in the room or outside the room during the breaks;
 - **Rules of the meeting:** can children be involved in deciding the rules of the meeting;
 - **Inclusive to all children:** are children from vulnerable groups involved and their specific needs considered: is there a need for adults to support them in a particular way (such as interpretation, support in travelling, etc), is assistive technology available, gender diversity among facilitators and adult participants, translation in languages of vulnerable groups (Roma, ethnic and national minorities), adapted means of transportation and accommodation (if necessary);
 - **Accessibility:** is the location accessible so children with disabilities can move independently throughout the whole building, including toilets;
 - **Facilitation:** set the pace so everyone can follow; use prompts to make sure all children understand and follow the conversation, encourage short but clear speeches, reduce the formalism of meeting; encourage children to speak while still respecting some children's choice to remain silent or communicate through written statements (e.g. Jamboard in an online meeting). Facilitators should check before and during the meeting if children feel comfortable contributing to the conversation and if they consider the topics in the conversation relevant for them;
 - **Working materials:** is there enough paper, pens, flipchart where young people can express themselves freely; could children eventually participate through tactile engagement, manipulating and making objects (by using, for instance clay, strings, paper and pencils to draw);
 - **Decoration:** could inspiring posters be displayed;
 - **Drinks and food:** is there sufficient water and refreshments in the room and are children permitted to take them at any time of the meeting; could child-friendly food be served for lunches and dinners? (in terms of what children usually prefer eating, but also which can easily take by children on plates or eaten with their hands);
 - **Evaluation and follow-up:** is there sufficient time for all participants to evaluate the meeting and understand which follow-up steps are to be done?
- ▶ **prepare sufficient preparatory information and on-boarding** for all those involved:
 - (if necessary) organise an onboarding session for adults involved (which could include a safeguarding session);

- prepare a reader friendly information about the activity, the role of children and expected results for the children and the parents/carers of children involved;
- ▶ especially for larger events **one adult needs to be available for providing psycho-social and emotional support** to the children during the meetings (if needed);
- ▶ allow children who cannot attend either offline or online meetings to express their opinions through:
 - taking an anonymous online survey, for instance by using Google forms or SurveyMonkey; or
 - sending photos, messages or videos (which presents or symbolises issues they want to address, and solutions they propose) to an email address which allows for full anonymity.

When engaging with children from most vulnerable groups, affected by extreme poverty and marginalisation, a few more aspects are useful to be considered:

- ▶ Check if they feel comfortable to have meetings in governmental offices (if the meeting takes place in a governmental office) and check if they have an ID card necessary to show when entering meetings in Governmental buildings;
- ▶ Check if they have any means of public transportation to travel to the venue of the meeting and if they can buy tickets; you might like to organise transportation if you have more children coming from one community;
- ▶ If needed, ensure that translation is done by a person children can trust;
- ▶ Ensure that children and adults accompanying them can take a shower and wash their hair before a meeting;
- ▶ Check if all children have clean clothes and shoes which they feel comfortable wearing at the meeting with other children and adults;
- ▶ Check if children have eaten before the meeting and do not feel hungry, and make sure you have checked if children have special dietary requirements;
- ▶ Ensure that children have all the necessary writing materials and let them know that they can also verbally express their views if they would prefer not to write;
- ▶ Have someone in your team who knows the community where the children come from identify possible areas where children and adults accompanying them might need additional support when engaging with other children and adults like politicians, civil servants, etc.;
- ▶ Check if children are permitted to remain at the meeting during late hours;
- ▶ Ensure that you have both male and female facilitators.

■ The Eurochild Children's Council has developed set of recommendations for creating a safe and comfortable spaces for participation:

- ▶ Everything is voluntary – it is important that all activities are truly voluntary, and that children understand that they can decide not to take part at any point.
- ▶ Openmindedness when things/activities do not go exactly as planned – supporting adults need to be flexible and openminded. Often this results in even better outcomes!
- ▶ Different ways of participating should be accommodated to help different children share their views.
- ▶ Supporting adults need to treat children how they want to be treated. Respect is important.
- ▶ Icebreakers - creating bonds and a good dynamic is really important!
- ▶ When you laugh and break things up with some distractions it is easier to focus and be productive.
- ▶ There should always be unstructured space to just chat – too much structure to workshops/ activities makes them less interesting and productive.
- ▶ Intercultural understanding is important to making everyone feel comfortable and safe sharing their views.
- ▶ Adults need to support children to understand different opinions and how to deal with conflict in a constructive way.
- ▶ Adults need safeguarding training.
- ▶ During meetings there should ideally be a breakout room/space just for children (and one trusted adult) where children can go to relax, take a break, speak to the child safeguarding focal person or talk to the other young people.

- ▶ All supporting adults should be trusted by children. It may also be beneficial for these adults to have some training in psychology, counselling etc. Children could also be supported by other young people, for example through a mentor system.
- ▶ Adults need to be patient and understand that children have different ways of participating, come from different contexts and experiences that might change how they approach activities.
- ▶ The time restraints of children should be understood and respected. Children often report that adults do not always understand or recognise the time pressures that they have between school, home life, extracurricular activities and in some cases, part time work. As a result, children can be left feeling pressured or overwhelmed by participatory activities.

Safeguarding hints and tips:

- ▶ For larger conferences, you should develop a Code of Conduct to be signed by all adults attending. A model used by the Council of Europe in a previous event can be consulted [here](#). This document should be signed by external participants, as well as by the employees, volunteers and the consultants of the organising organisations.
- ▶ Online events require additional safeguarding preparation. You can read [this document](#) to secure the safeguarding of children engaging with adults through online events.
- ▶ If you are a national organisation and plan to organise a larger online platform for consultations, you can check [this document](#) for guidance on how to secure children and young people on online platforms.
- ▶ Conduct a safeguarding risk assessment for the activity. If children must travel to the venue of the meeting, additional risks related to means of transportation and the travel are to be considered. This [tool](#) provide you with detailed guidance on how to assess safeguarding risks when organising events and activities with children.
- ▶ A thorough consent form model can be consulted [here](#). See the difference between consent and assent in the tip sheet developed by the safeguarding [Resources and Support Hub here](#).

Chapter 5

Providing feedback and evaluating children's participation in decision-making processes

Chapter 5 highlights the value of feedback and follow-up to secure the success of your participation activities. It provides several examples of how to structure these. Children consulted for this report mentioned receiving feedback on the results and outcomes of their participation as an important and nevertheless often missing aspect in their work with adults. One of the children participating in consultations expressed a strong need for well-structured and consistent feedback processes:

"We often don't get feedback! We participate, we say something, and then nothing happens. We don't get the feedback about what happened with what we said. Or what cannot happen as we suggested, why and what we shall do to make it able to happen!"

■ Laura Lundy emphasises in her work the importance of providing feedback to children engaged in decision-making processes, and identify four "Fs" to be respected in providing feedback¹²:

1. **Full** response with substance and details,
2. **Friendly**, easy to be understood by all involved in consultations,
3. **Fast**, as soon as decisions are made and progress in implementation is achieved, and
4. **Followed-up** by a more continuous communication between children and adults.

■ We recommend following practical steps to be considered when providing feedback to children involved in decision-making processes, and consider **these equally relevant for local and national authorities**.

- ▶ **Approach the process of providing feedback as a learning process** and consider:
 - Children appreciate feedback which clearly indicates what they have done well and what and how they could still improve.
 - There is never too much feedback!
 - Feedback should always start with a positive observation about children's participation, continue (if necessary) with a suggestion or something to be improved and end with a positive observation;
 - Children appreciate receiving feedback from adults who know them well, or have worked together with them.
 - Adults should consider providing feedback as an important way of interacting with children in decision-making processes, and they should prepare well when providing feedback. Children need to not only hear about what can be improved, but also why it is important to make some changes and how improvement can happen. As an example, you can imagine such feedback like this: *"I really appreciated how you presented yourself in front of everyone and how you managed to hold eye contact throughout your entire speech. Next time, make sure that you talk louder so that everyone in the audience can hear you, as it's very valuable what you have to say. It can be helpful to stay straight, in order to speak up."* In any case, avoid saying "but", as this can dismiss in the mind of children all positive aspects you mentioned before about their participation and the decisions made.
 - Adults and children should agree on a time to follow-up with children after providing them with feedback, and check if children need any further support in considering their feedback.
- ▶ **Feedback should include information about the outcomes of the project and how the children's contributions were used.** If their recommendations or changes were not taken up by the authorities, organisers should be transparent about this and inform the children of the developments, to help build trust and provide a full picture of the reality of effective participation.

12. <https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/148759327/Tokenismfin.pdf>

- ▶ By developing **consistent feedback sessions, you can raise children’s motivation** to contribute and participate.
- ▶ **Encourage and support children to provide feedback** about how their participation was organised, their opinions considered and how they felt about the overall process. If children do not feel comfortable providing this feedback in a face-to-face conversation, an anonymous channel could be provided to them (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Google- or Microsoft forms, or an anonymous email).
- ▶ **Follow-up on the feedback provided to children and by children!** This could mean allocating resources to support children in developing new skills and competences as suggested (such as providing them with trainings and mentoring), as well as providing adults with more information and child participation skills developing activities (external trainings, peer-to-peer exchanges, in-house training and coaching, etc)

All children consulted agreed that feedback is often missing from their discussions with adults.

The feedback children would wish for is:

- ▶ Individual;
- ▶ As objective as possible;
- ▶ Adapted to children’s age, experience, and capacity;
- ▶ Focused what children’s strengths are and what they have done well;
- ▶ Short;
- ▶ Given as soon as something positive happened because of children’s participation, so children can reflect on what happened;
- ▶ Ideally anonymous, especially for children who are shy and very sensitive;
- ▶ Referring to real achievements;
- ▶ Provided in a non-formal, friendly and joyful manner.

The children we spoke to have never provided feedback to the adults with whom they engage in decision-making processes but would very much wish to do so!

■ Comprehensive evaluation of child participation in decision-making processes should be planned for and resourced adequately at the very beginning of planning a child participation process.

■ We invite you to consider following guiding recommendations and questions when evaluating children’s participation in decision-making processes, and consider **these are equally relevant for local and national authorities**:

- ▶ Whenever planning for child participation in decision-making processes, **plan and budget for specific evaluation activities**.
- ▶ **Ask children what needs to happen** to consider their participation in the decision making process as making a sustainable difference. In child participation in decision making, both the process of participation and the results of their engagement are important. Evaluate both:
 - The process of participation, meaning the activities organised (type of activities, frequency, quality of interaction), the resources made available for children’s participation; and
 - The results of their participation: how were children’s opinions considered, what they have changed already or how they could make a difference in the future, how children have developed throughout the participation process and how their participation could change for other children in their communities, etc.
- ▶ **Connect the evaluation questions to what was planned and promised.** When evaluating their participation, children will often refer to what was planned and promised to happen because of their participation. When expectations are too far from results, trust and motivation are shattered;
- ▶ **Inform children about the importance and the necessity of conducting an evaluation.** This is an important opportunity for children to understand how the outcomes of an evaluation can be considered in becoming more realistic, or more creative about how children’ views can be thought and considered when making decisions;

- ▶ **Develop targeted evaluation questions about how safeguarding, inclusion and diversity principles were considered:**
 - when children were involved in decision-making processes,
 - in the safeguarding measures taken to protect them, and
 - to the extent decisions taken can allow for more diversity, inclusion and equity in their community or in society in general.
- ▶ **Involve children in conducting evaluation activities**, and a few activities could be organised, such as:
 - Have a dedicated evaluation focus-group with children
 - Have children acting as peer-evaluators; with support of the adult evaluator they can interview their peers in child consultative structures or children in the community, about how children's participation have made a difference in the decisions made.
 - Guarantee the safety of children involved in evaluations and [this guide](#) developed by Save the Children, might be helpful in this regard.
- ▶ **Involve children in discussing the results of the evaluation** and decide adaptations of future child participation activities;
- ▶ **Evaluations benefit by having external evaluators involved.**

TIP: For more inspiration of the importance of evaluating children's participation in the decision making process, it would be useful to consult The Evaluation Checklist developed in the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making, accessible [here](#).

Safeguarding hints and tips:

- ▶ Have all expert consultants involved in evaluation signing your safeguarding policy and Code of Conduct.
- ▶ You may wish to conduct safeguarding background checks for external consultants who will interview children directly, as an added layer of protection.
- ▶ Always have more than one adult present for evaluations involving children.
- ▶ Secure informed consent before using the data from any children involved in an evaluation, and their legal guardians. This [webpage](#) of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children provides you with guidance on how to design consent forms for children, parents and legal guardians.
- ▶ Evaluation activities shall only be conducted in safe and comfortable places.
- ▶ Consider potential safeguarding risks in monitoring and evaluation, such as those related to data collection, using pictures and testimonials in the evaluation report and any other communication activities.
- ▶ Name a safeguarding contact person for children within your organisation and inform children who are involved in the evaluation about their right to report any safeguarding incident which might occur during the evaluation.
- ▶ For further guidance you can consult [this guide on safeguarding in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning](#), available [here](#).

Chapter 6

Safeguarding within child participation in decision-making processes

Keeping Children Safe¹³ (one of the world's largest networks of specialists and organisations concerned with safeguarding) defines child safeguarding as *the responsibility organisations have to make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children. This ensures they do not expose children to risk of harm and abuse and any concerns about children's safety are reported to the appropriate authorities.*

■ Every adult engaging with children in decision-making processes in a national and local authority has the responsibility to ensure that no child, at any time, can be subject to abuse, neglect, or violence. There are a few guiding principles suggested by Keeping Children Safe which could help national and local authorities framework their efforts for a safe child participation in decision-making processes:

- ▶ All children have equal rights to protection from harm;
- ▶ Everybody has a responsibility to support the protection of children;
- ▶ Organisations have a duty of care to children with whom they work, are in contact with, or who are affected by their work and operations;
- ▶ If organisations work with partners, they have a responsibility to help partners meet the minimum requirements on protection;
- ▶ All actions on child safeguarding are taken in the best interests of the child, which are paramount.

■ Involving children in decision-making processes, requires careful and continuous support to prevent any acts of violence against them happening. However, one should not attempt to avoid engaging children in decision-making processes due to fear of safeguarding risks. Involving children themselves in discussing risks and identifying means of mitigation can be an important part of decision making in a child's best interests.

■ Children's participation can expose children to various risks. Often children who speak about challenges they face and how they engage in addressing them can face humiliation, bullying from peers and adults, and can be exposed to violence in their communities, at home, at school or in childcare settings. When involved in conversations about children affected by exploitation, neglect or abuse, children who have been victims of violence can experience secondary trauma.

■ In chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 above, we have suggested some specific safeguarding risks to be considered at every step of planning, implementing, and evaluating children's participation in decision-making processes. The list of Dos and Don'ts below add some more general issues to be aware of, to ensure that neither children nor adults are exposed to any safeguarding risks when engaging in decision-making processes.

■ DOs that support you to create a safe environment for children and adults engaged in co-creating decisions:

- ▶ Recognise that safeguarding risks are possible in every organisation;
- ▶ Investigate to find out the main reasons harm to children is happening: lack of information or abusive behaviours? Address them accordingly.
- ▶ Appoint and disseminate contact details of an appointed Safeguarding Contact Person;
- ▶ Conduct regular assessments of safeguarding risks associated with children's participation in decision-making processes;
- ▶ Make sure that your safeguarding policies and code of conducts sufficiently refer to child participation activities;
- ▶ Develop specific child safeguarding policies for online and offline participation events, which should be known and signed by all participants;

13. For more resources, guidance and tools visit their webpage here: <https://www.keepingchildrensafe.global>

- ▶ Conduct regular child safeguarding training and orientation sessions for those working directly with children and provide them with ongoing supervision;
- ▶ Conduct safeguarding checks for all adults working directly with children (both staff, volunteers, and consultants);
- ▶ Have a child friendly version of your safeguarding policy that includes how to report and respond to safeguarding concerns;
- ▶ Inform children about reporting channels and what happens after a concern has been reported;
- ▶ If you use anonymous feedback boxes and emails, check them every day;
- ▶ Let children speak for themselves and trust and believe the children's story;
- ▶ Have clear procedures on how to respond when children disclose abuses at home, at school, while traveling to you or somewhere else in the community;
- ▶ Recognise that the family or community do not always welcome the participation of children in such activities (as some children might skip income generating activities to participate).

Children's participation in decision-making processes might be communicated by local and national authorities over various communication channels, using photos, videos or testimonials of the children. Following safeguarding tips could be considered¹⁴:

- ▶ Images of children must not show them in any state of undress or in inappropriate poses;
- ▶ Details attached to images and stories must not allow tracing children's addresses;
- ▶ Distinctive buildings, street signs or landmarks should not be included in an image if they identify where a child lives or works;
- ▶ Geotagging of images should be disabled when taking photographs;
- ▶ Ensure the photographer/journalist/translator you have employed has been properly vetted and reference checked;
- ▶ Make sure you have been given permission by children and their parents/carers to take their image and use their information, and their families are not put at further risk or made vulnerable.

■ A few DON'Ts need to be added:

- ▶ Do not patronise the child
- ▶ Do not show favouritism to a child or a group of children
- ▶ Do not physically, sexually or emotionally harm, or threaten to harm a child
- ▶ Do not trivialise abuse in any form: emotional, physical, sexual
- ▶ Do not engage in the use of physical interventions as a form of response to misbehaviour, unless it is necessary by way of restraint
- ▶ Do not engage in any form of sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18, regardless of the age of consent or custom locally
- ▶ Do not engage in relationships which could be an abuse of trust, for example a sexual relationship with a beneficiary family member
- ▶ Do not take part in inappropriate physical, verbal or sexual behaviour with or in the presence of children (including online or via mobile phones)
- ▶ Do not use foul language or provocative language/gestures towards any child or member of staff
- ▶ Do not drink alcohol or use harmful substances when working with children and never supply alcohol or harmful substances to a child
- ▶ Do not send private messages to children you've met in child participation activities
- ▶ Do not do for a child what the child can do for himself or herself;
- ▶ Do not allow concerns, allegations or suspicions of abuse to go unreported

¹⁴. Adapted from KSC (2014)

Closing words

This guide is about how possible break up with a past of silence of children, set under the famous sentence dating back in the 15th century: “*children should be seen, not heard*”¹⁵. While acknowledging that there is still a lot of work to be done to have children equally present and engaged in decision-making processes, progress has been made and can be built upon.

■ In the light of Laura Lundy’s encouragement, this guide should demystify the need for perfection in child participation. It should encourage those who are curious, courageous, and visionary about child participation to try it out when making policy decisions. The emerging decisions will be more authentic, adapted to the needs of the communities, inclusive to any form of diversity and supported by everyone in the community, including children.

■ The guide might also serve as inspiration for those adults, public servants and NGO employees who assume a role in advocating on behalf of children for policy and practice which fully align to the participation model developed by Professor Lundy.

■ In an article published in the International Journal of Children’s Rights¹⁶, McMellon and Tisdall suggest three challenges which we still need to address to increase child participation in decision-making processes:

- ▶ Adults and adult systems poorly support children and young people’s participation. There are still significant reservations of decision-making adults to co-create with children. Used rather as decoration or tokenism, consultations with children do not develop to processes of engagement for co-creating decisions.
- ▶ Participation lacks impact;
- ▶ Access to participation opportunities is not equal. While children from better socio-economic backgrounds and older children are more likely to be involved, specific groups of children have their views less likely to influence decision making, such as very young children, children who are in care or children with communication difficulties.

■ With this guide we aim to support decision makers at national and local levels, as well as the experts and organisations supporting them, to address and reduce the challenges above. We wish furthermore to provide inspiration, resources and context for advocating for the rights of children to have a voice in decisions affecting their lives.

■ At both local and national levels, advocacy champions, adults and children can call for:

- ▶ legal provisions to secure children’s involvement in decision-making processes, and where they exist, to ensure that all children are involved, including the seldom-heard ones;
- ▶ promoting a stronger language on child participation, both at local, national and international levels (e.g. within the European Union and the United Nations organisations);
- ▶ increased collective and institutional awareness of the importance of child participation, which also reflects in resources and opportunities available for it;
- ▶ reducing the impact of inequity of the internet and access to devices; and
- ▶ reducing safety risks of involvement for vulnerable groups of children, among others.

■ We acknowledge the wealth of experience and guidance existing already in the various local and national contexts, experience which can support contextualisation and amplify participation as described by this report. By no means should this report be seen as a static and unique set of rules to be followed, a universal receipt for child participation. We are learning from all the professionals and public servants engaging with children in their work, in their local and national authorities. We are learning from their, and our own, successes and failures.

■ All parts of the report can be further developed based on these local and national experiences. The Council of Europe welcomes feedback, suggestions for improvement and further promising practices for engaging children in decision-making processes. They can be shared through the Child Participation Leadership Platform developed by the Council of Europe and its partners in the framework of the CP4EUROPE project.

15. A sentence attributed to a clergyman, John Mirk who wrote it down in 1450.

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ANNEX – A self-assessment tool for local and national authorities

For whom is this self-assessment tool

This self-assessment tool accompanies the “Let’s Decide Together!” Guide for meaningful and effective engaging children in decision-making processes.

■ The self-assessment tool is meant for **adults responsible for planning for and engaging with children in decision-making processes in local and national authorities**. In most cases they are public servants who design and organise themselves child participation activities in decision-making processes taking place in national and local authorities.

■ The aim of the Guide is to support all of them, with practical guidance and inspiring good practices, to make participation in decision-making processes a regular, safe and accessible practice for every child. The self-assessment tool helps them to benchmark their current level of performance in engaging with children in decision-making processes against the recommendations of the Guide, and to plan for improvements.

■ The self-assessment tool follows the structure of the Guide, and is organised in six chapters:

- ▶ **Pre-requisites** for meaningful, inclusive and safe child participation in decision-making processes (Chapter 1)
- ▶ **Domains, topics and activities** where children can be engaged in decision making; (Chapter 2)
- ▶ **Planning** activities for engaging with children in decision-making processes; (Chapter 3)
- ▶ **Conducting activities** of engaging with children in decision-making processes; (Chapter 4)
- ▶ **Providing feedback and evaluate** child participation in decision-making processes; (Chapter 5), and
- ▶ **Safeguarding** within child participation in decision-making processes (Chapter 6).

Chapter 1 – Prerequisites for meaningful, inclusive and safe child participation in decision-making processes in national and local authorities

Self-assessment on organizational readiness to include children meaningfully and safely in decision-making processes.

Important prerequisites to meaningful, inclusive and safe child participation in decision making include:

1. **Relevant trainings and professional development opportunities** organised and facilitated by specially appointed trained staff members, with a deep understanding of children's rights
2. **One full-time staff member** in the authority has the responsibility to coordinate child participation in decision-making processes
3. **Adults meeting children are provided an orientation** on how to engage with children in making decisions and the impact of such activities.
4. **Children are offered training opportunities** on child participation, financial education, citizenship, communication, and negotiation in decision making, or other relevant topics of their choosing.
5. **Networking opportunities to connect** with like-minded organisations, networks or platforms where child participation in decision making is discussed
6. **Identifying “champions”** in engaging with children in decision-making processes.

Performance level				Plan to improve		
1	2	3	4	Right now	In six months	In one year

Performance levels:

- 1 - This has not been attempted.
- 2 - This has been attempted or is in progress.
- 3 - This has been nearly achieved.
- 4 - This has been thoroughly achieved.

Plans to improve:

Right now - identifying “champions” or advocates for children’s participation, and networking opportunities can be achievable in the short term with few resources.

In six months - up to six months may be needed for some aspects, such as hiring staff, planning for accessibility and inclusion, planning training for children or adults.

In one year - up to a year or more may be needed to make large changes to long term plans or policies, as well as budgets for larger scale events and training activities.

Chapter 2 – Domains, topics and activities where children can be engaged in decision making

Self-assessment on deciding in which domains, topics and activities children should be involved in decision-making processes

A quality decision on domains, topics and activities for involving children:

Nationally...

1. **Consults the national legislation and policies** to understand what is already compulsory in fulfilling child participation in decision-making processes;

2. **Reviews existing efforts** of your national/local authorities to engage with children in decision making process, analyses possible gaps and decides on further steps;

Locally...

1. **Assesses how feasible it is for your organisation to coordinate and establish permanent, formal structures** such as Children's Councils, Children's Parliaments, or Children's Advisory Boards;

2. **Collects information about the impact of children's views on made decisions** and processes and shares them in your organisation (e.g. increasing relevance of decision taken, more equitable and inclusive budget allocation, improved services performance, etc.);

3. **Consults with other public authorities and NGOs** with more experience in engaging children in decision-making processes and learn from their experience;

4. **Collects children's and staff's opinions** on which domains, topics and activities will benefit from engaging with children; and involves children in prioritising these;

Connects with organisations that provide services for children in vulnerable situations and learns from them about how to involve these children in identifying and prioritising domains. Actively seeks cooperation with child-led initiatives, especially those where the children involved have been themselves affected by marginalisation.

Performance level				Plan to improve		
1	2	3	4	Right now	In six months	In one year

Performance levels:

- 1 - This has not been attempted.
- 2 - This has been attempted or is in progress.
- 3 - This has been nearly achieved.
- 4 - This has been thoroughly achieved.

Plans to improve:

Right now - this can be achievable when few resources are needed to address the change. Some examples of things that might be addressed right now, include small adjustments to behavior, communication plans, and data collection methods.

In six months - up to six months may be needed to change program plans, make minor changes to budgets and roles, or to add steps or meetings to a consultation process.

In one year - up to a year or more may be needed to make large changes to the number and skills of staff, funding amounts or overall budget allocations; or to change overall project plans and communication plans.

Chapter 3 – Planning activities for engaging with children in decision-making processes

Self-assessment on planning activities for engaging with children in decision-making processes

A quality activity plan:

1. **Identifies and allocates necessary resources** (to fulfill the preconditions in section 6.5)

2. **Advocates for establishing a permanent children’s consultative body** in your organisation;

3. **Nominates dedicated staff** members with previous experience in child participation who could coordinate the process and possibly act as facilitators. If possible, partner with organisations or hire consultants with sound experience on facilitating children’s participation in decision-making processes;

4. **Identifies young people in the community who have already participated in decision-making processes** to involve them as mentors and buddies to support children in their participation;

5. **Involves children, politicians, public servants, specialised NGOs and consultants in a dedicated meeting** on planning for engaging children in decision making process;

6. **Assesses the needs for orientation and training** of those involved (children and adults) and identifies possible organisations and consultants who could support;

7. **Develops a set of eligibility criteria** which allow for maximum of transparency and clarity on who could be involved, the necessity on any previous knowledge and experience, as well as in which language will the activities take place and how will translation be provided (think of Braille and sign language, as well as languages spoken by ethnic and national minorities);

8. **Considers the diversity within the children’s population in your community** and develops selection criteria to ensure that this diversity is reflected in the constitutions of the group of children participating in decision-making processes. Think of age (younger children tend to be excluded from consultation process), gender identity and sexual orientation, disabilities, belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, children in care or in conflict with justice, etc.;

9. **Prepares child-friendly informative materials** about the process of engagement, its purpose and impact on the lives of children and adults, the necessary information and skills children need to be involved, how they can express their opinions, how evaluation will happen, and feedback be provided.

Performance level				Plan to improve		
1	2	3	4	Right now	In six months	In one year

10. Identifies partners which could support you to disseminate the information about collective participation opportunities with children, maybe schools and school unions, health care institutions, prisons, child protection and care organisations, child clubs, day-care centres in vulnerable communities, on-line and off-line “influencers” in the communities.

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Performance levels:

- 1 - This has not been attempted.
- 2 - This has been attempted or is in progress.
- 3 - This has been nearly achieved.
- 4 - This has been thoroughly achieved.

Plans to improve:

Right now - this can be achievable when few resources are needed to address the change. Some examples of things that might be addressed right now include organising meetings, conducting an organisational needs assessment for capacity building, identifying staff to lead a process, and identifying potential partners or participants.

In six months - up to six months may be needed to change selection criteria, update and coordinate communication plans and to create child-friendly communication and facilitation materials. Establishing partnerships, planning a stakeholder meeting, identifying children who have already had experience with participation, (re)allocating resources, preparing child-friendly materials can all take up to six months and sometimes longer.

In one year - up to a year or more may be needed to make large changes to advocacy plans and messages, to run an equitable recruitment process to set up your group, to engage consultants and trainers in a new project. Creating more in-depth capacity building resources, establishing lasting partnerships and carrying out a capacity building project can take up to a year.

Chapter 4 – Conducting activities to engage with children in decision-making processes

Self-assessment on conducting activities to engage children in decision-making processes

While conducting activities to engage children in decision-making processes you should:

1. **Design activities for the ages of children involved.**

2. **Consider accessibility needs** for children with disabilities, including deaf or partially deaf children, those with vision impairment, and otherwise physically or cognitively disabled children (e.g. location, interpretation, closed captioning, length of meetings, etc.).

3. **Consider cultural and religious beliefs** as well as language needs. (e.g. not scheduling meetings during religious holidays).

4. **Consider the needs of girls and boys as well as gender diverse children** to participate. (Examples include gender-neutral bathrooms, the opportunity to share pronouns, the opportunity to have girls-only sessions depending on cultural preferences or comfort).

5. **Involve facilitators and interpreters** who can support children's equal participation.

6. **Choose the right format** for engaging the children based on their needs and the subject matter: either online, in-person or hybrid.

For in-person activities:

7. **Consider the time of day.** Are the meetings organised before or after their school activities, at a time when they are allowed to be out of their house?

8. **Consider the space.** Is it big enough for plenary and smaller groups, with lots of light and possibilities of opening doors and windows, a flexible structure where chairs can be organised in a circle, or children can be seated on the floor (on pillows or carpet); are children allowed to take off their shoes?

9. **Provide a break room** that is a separate quiet space where children can chill out.

10. **Consider the ratio of child to adult participants.** Ideally, the number of children and adult participants shall be balanced; if possible, a child should never be alone in a meeting where everybody else is an adult.

11. **Prepare sufficient information and on-boarding** for all those involved (e.g. a booklet or a preparatory meeting may be useful)

12. **Consider your resources to make the event comfortable and fun:** snacks/meals, water, pens, paper, decorations such as inspiring posters if they would improve the experience.

Performance level				Plan to improve		
1	2	3	4	Right now	In six months	In one year

13. **Make sure one adult is available to give psycho-social and emotional support** to the children during the meetings in case any issue comes up; this is especially important for larger meetings.

14. **Allow children who cannot attend either off or on-line meetings to express their opinions** (e.g. with a survey or by sending messages, photos or videos about issues and solutions). Make sure there is an option to be anonymous.

Performance levels:

- 1 - This has not been attempted.
- 2 - This has been attempted or is in progress.
- 3 - This has been nearly achieved.
- 4 - This has been thoroughly achieved.

Plans to improve:

Right now - Designing activities with consideration for the needs of particular demographics of children are some actions that can be accomplished quickly.

In six months - Establishing effective online meetings and engaging skilled facilitators can take up to six months to plan and carry out effectively.

In one year - In-person events need up to a year to plan well, as they involve bigger budgets, more safeguarding considerations and greater logistical planning.

Chapter 5 – Providing feedback and evaluating children’s participation in decision-making processes

Self-assessment on providing feedback and evaluation for children’s participation in decision-making processes.

When providing feedback and evaluation for children’s participation in decision-making processes:

1. **Manage expectations and communicate clearly about what children can expect** from the event (when expectations are too far from results, trust and motivation are shattered).
2. **Try to arrange for children to receive feedback from adults who know them well** or have worked together with them.
3. **Give feedback which clearly indicates what they have done well and what and how they could still improve.** Feedback shall always start with a positive observation about children’s participation, continue (if necessary) with a suggestion or something to be improved and end with a positive observation.
4. **Prepare well when providing feedback.**
5. **Develop consistent feedback sessions** to raise children’s motivation to contribute and participate.
6. **Encourage and support children to provide feedback about their participation:** how it was organised, and how they felt about the overall process. If children do not feel comfortable providing this feedback in a face-to-face conversation, an anonymous channel could be provided to them (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Google- or Microsoft forms, or an anonymous email).
7. **Follow-up on the feedback provided to children and by children!** This could mean allocating resources to support children in developing new skills and competences as suggested (such as providing them with training and mentoring), as well as providing adults with more information and child participation skills.

Performance level				Plan to improve		
1	2	3	4	Right now	In six months	In one year

Performance levels:

- 1 - This has not been attempted.
- 2 - This has been attempted or is in progress.
- 3 - This has been nearly achieved.
- 4 - This has been thoroughly achieved.

Plans to improve:

Right now - Feedback can be provided anytime and ongoingly.

In six months - It may take up to 6 months to put in place a feedback cycle and train adults and children on how to provide and receive feedback.

In one year - It can take up to a year to monitor a feedback cycle, including follow-ups on feedback provided and received.

Chapter 6 – Safeguarding within child participation in decision-making processes

Self-assessment on safeguarding children’s participation in decision-making processes.

Key safeguarding considerations:

1. **Conduct regular assessments of safeguarding risks** associated with children’s participation in decision-making processes;

2. **Develop specific child safeguarding policies** for online and off-line participation events, and make sure that your safeguarding policies and code of conducts sufficiently refer to child participation activities;

3. **The safeguarding policy is known and signed by all participants.**

4. **Conduct regular child safeguarding trainings** and orientation sessions for those working directly with children and provide them with on-going supervision;

5. **Conduct background checks** for all adults working directly with children (both staff, volunteers, and consultants);

6. **Have a child friendly version of your safeguarding policy** that includes how to report and respond to safeguarding concerns;

7. **Have clear procedures on how to respond when children disclose** about abuses at home, at school, while traveling to you or somewhere else in the community;

8. **Recognise that some families or communities do not always welcome the participation of children** in community activities (for example, some children might skip income generating activities to participate).

Performance level				Plan to improve		
1	2	3	4	Right now	In six months	In one year

Performance levels:

- 1 - This has not been attempted.
- 2 - This has been attempted or is in progress.
- 3 - This has been nearly achieved.
- 4 - This has been thoroughly achieved.

Plans to improve:

Right now - Safeguarding risk assessments, background checks and clear procedures can begin quickly with minimal costs. A child-friendly safeguarding policy can also be created at any time. Similarly everyone can be asked to sign a safeguarding policy without much time and resources needed to implement the change.

In six months - Developing and delivering safeguarding training, developing new policies and doing community outreach can take up to six months.

In one year - Sustaining the training and policies, re-doing risk assessments and following up on incidents with better training can take up to a year. It can take up to a year to ensure all new staff are trained and onboarded to become familiar with new procedures, policies and the organisation’s safeguarding culture.

This Guide was developed under the Joint Project “Strengthening National Child Participation Frameworks and Action in Europe”. The project is co-funded by the European Union (DG JUST) and the Council of Europe, and implemented from April 2021 to June 2023 by the Council of Europe Children’s Rights Division in cooperation with its 5 partner countries – the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia. This Guide is for adults responsible for planning for, and engaging with, children in decision making processes in local and national authorities. In most cases they are public servants who design and organise child participation activities in decision making processes taking place in national and local authorities. The aim of the Guide is to support all of them, with practical guidance and inspiring good practices, to make participation in decision making processes a regular, safe and accessible practice for every child.

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